

# Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve

"A Wetland of International Importance" *International Ramsar Convention, 2005*



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Ken Wiseman, Executive Director  
Marine Life Protection Act Initiative  
California Natural Resources Agency  
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311  
Sacramento, CA 95814

October 8, 2009

Dear Director Wiseman:

Please accept this letter as support for the MLPA Group 3 analysis and site designation for the South Coast Bioregion's Tijuana River Mouth SMCA. The shape and size of this protected area is the result of a compromise that accommodates concerns voiced by commercial and recreational commercial fishermen, shore fishermen, the City of Imperial Beach, and the military.

The Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR) is an ecological treasure of the San Diego region. It is the largest un-bisected coastal wetland in southern California and is one of only 25 wetlands in the entire United States that is formally designated as a Ramsar "Wetland of International Importance." It is home to several endangered species, including the Light-Footed Clapper Rail and California Least Tern. For over 25 years, NOAA and California State Parks have worked together to protect and enhance the Reserve.

Inextricable linkages, where the river meets the sea, are key to estuarine health and productivity, including processes like larval recruitment and the transfer of nutrients, sediment, and freshwater. One such place, at the Tijuana River mouth delta, clearly illustrates the critical connection between the coastal zone and a vigorous estuary, and vice versa. By just walking the beach trail on Imperial Beach to the river mouth, one can see life teeming, and data from research, a core component of the NOAA NEERS system, reinforces this quantitatively. The cobble, soft sediment, and intermittent kelp forest offshore have equal importance as coastal habitats and feeding grounds.

This region has shown remarkable resilience despite the persistent threats it faces, including impaired water quality and the choking sediment deposition from storms and the anticipated consequences of the cut and fill slopes that were created as part of the Border Infrastructure Project. Without further protective measures provided by the establishment of the Tijuana River Mouth SMCA, it is unknown how much longer these fragile ecosystems can put up the fight.

Tijuana River Estuary requires adaptive management approaches. It is essential that the prescriptions for this proposed Marine Conservation Area ensure continued opportunities for research and monitoring in order to understand the nexus and dynamics between marine and estuarine systems.

Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR)  
MLPA Comment

Of equal importance, the Conservation Area must accommodate the deposition of sediment below the mean high tide line in order to restore lost estuarine habitat and allow the Reserve to maintain sediment basins that protect the estuary. Our support for this proposal is contingent upon these prescriptions being incorporated in the final designation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the MLPA process.

Respectfully,

P.P. Kristen Goarich

On behalf of  
Clayton Phillips, Manager  
Tijuana River National Estuarine Research Reserve (TRNERR)